

# Master of Ceremonies

*Chief takes part in nation's largest "change of command"*

by Staff Sgt. Elaine Aviles  
photo by Tech. Sgt. Tracy DeMarco

## Chief Master Sgt. Gerard Gething

Senior enlisted adviser, Joint Task Force-Armed Forces Inaugural Committee, Washington, D.C.

**Years in Air Force:** 28

**Hometown:** Scranton, Pa.

**Reason for joining:** "I didn't want to go to college. When my older brother, Bill, joined the Air Force in 1975, my mother said, 'Your brother made up his mind; now you need to do the same.' She suggested I join the Air Force, and I thought it was a good idea."

**Assignments:** Lackland Air Force Base, Texas; Goodfellow Air Force Base, Texas; Kadena Air Base, Japan (two tours); Fort George G. Meade, Md. (three tours); Wheeler Air Force Base, Hawaii; Kelly Air Force Base, Texas (two tours); Misawa Air Base, Japan; JTF-AFIC, Washington, D.C.

**Best thing about the job:** "The opportunity to take part in the nation's largest change of command ceremony."

**Coming up:** "I'll be on the executive action group on the Air Staff. There's never been a chief on that staff before, and I'll provide an enlisted presence for that team of hard working professionals."

For more than 27 years, Chief Master Sgt. Gerard Gething kept his work under wraps. An analyst in the top secret world of intelligence, he wasn't at liberty to discuss his job, even with his closest friends and family.

From "silent warrior" to presidential event planner, the chief's covert days are temporarily over. As the highest-ranking enlisted Airman at Joint Task Force — Armed Forces Inaugural Committee, the chief was involved in one of the most visible, talked about events of the year — the presidential inauguration.

The Army-run task force, staffed by members from every military branch, stands up every four years to coordinate military support for the inauguration. This support is substantial, as the military provides everything from musical units and marching bands, to ushers and salute batteries.

While Chief Gething had seen several inaugurations on television, he was shocked at the scope of military involvement.

"I spent nearly 28 years in the intelligence field and never strayed," Chief Gething said. "I hadn't even heard of AFIC until I saw an ad on the Air Force Personnel Center Web site, so I had no idea that the military played such a big role."

Intrigued by the job ad, Chief Gething applied, and was selected from a pool of 10 chiefs for the committee's senior enlisted adviser position.

He "moved" from nearby Fort Meade, Md., in March and became one of the 210 corps cadre, a select group of servicemembers from throughout the nation who move to Washington D.C. for about a year to tackle the massive challenge of inaugural planning. Their backgrounds are as varied as their uniforms, since the task force draws from various career fields such as personnel, operations, logistics, public affairs and communications.

The chief likened the job to "starting an installation from scratch."

"There was no continuity book; just a four-year-old plan," he said. "In the early stages, we focused on standing up, getting telephones, pencils, pens ... all the basics people take for granted."

"We had to hit the ground running," he added. "There's no time for training. People in-processed in 30 minutes then got to work."

While setup is a daunting job in itself, as the senior enlisted adviser, the chief also provided a communication link between the commander, an Army one-star, and his temporary troops. From Soldiers to Sailors, enlisted to officer, the chief had to blend vastly different committee members into a seamless team.

"We all had the same end goal in sight; we just had different means for getting there," the chief said. "We had to set aside service culture differences to work together."

Chief Gething's intelligence background came in handy, as he was accustomed to tackling a joint environment. However, he never counted on a battle with Mother Nature.

"Quality of life was a challenge," he said. "We were in 200-year-old buildings at Fort McNair [Washington, D.C.] and, as temperatures dropped, adequate heating became an issue."

The chief hadn't seen anything yet. Up until election day, the task force carried out its job with a minimal amount of stress. But after the president was elected, the pressure mounted as the countdown to inauguration day began.

Once the president's civilian-

staffed inauguration committee got its marching orders, it handed the military portion over to the task force. The cadre was left with just 79 days to pull off a flawless performance.

"It's not a lot of time, but we counted ourselves lucky," the chief said. "Four years ago, because of the [voting] incident in Florida, the task force had just 35 days."

Task members shifted from planning to execution, and the chief became a jack-of-all trades, providing

help and support where needed.

As the committee's deadline neared, troop numbers increased, eventually hitting the 700-person mark shortly before inauguration day.

"It wasn't easy, but I was confident we could carry it off," Chief Gething said. "I was in awe of AFIC team members and their abilities every day."

The task force's painstaking attention to detail paid off as it kicked into high gear for the inauguration

period — Jan. 15 to 24. Hundreds of servicemembers flew in to provide a 1,500-person cordon along the parade route; others monitored operations or provided transportation support.

As for Chief Gething, he was, for once, thrust into the spotlight. He was told just two days prior to Inauguration Day that he would be marching in the parade as part of the presidential escort.

"It was definitely a once in a lifetime opportunity and something I'll not forget," he said.

After the parade, the chief assumed the role of commentator, announcing parade participants from a media booth directly across from the presidential reviewing stand.

"What an honor to be one of the first military members to salute the president following his swearing in ceremony," he said.

The festivities seemed to pass as quickly as the last musical notes at a late-night inaugural ball. And the corps cadre was once again left with a daunting task — cleanup.

"We have a lot of boxes to pack," he said. "Then, I'll help ensure everyone gets to where they need to go."

The party may be over, but the chief said he'll always remember the experience.

"The world's eyes were on the United States and democracy that day," Chief Gething added. "I'm most proud of the opportunity I had to be a part of that, and I couldn't be more proud of how the women and men of our small AFIC team came together and performed" 🇺🇸

